

Expectations of Chinese Families of Children with Disabilities Towards American Schools

Lusa Lo

Abstract

Working collaboratively with culturally and linguistically diverse families of children with disabilities can sometimes be a challenge for educators and service providers. As the number of Asian students with disabilities continues to increase, very little research has focused on how collaborative partnerships can be developed between schools and their families. The purpose of this study was to examine the expectations of 12 Chinese families of children with disabilities towards American schools. One-on-one interviews were used in the study. Results suggested that the participants had five expectations from American schools: (1) accessibility of quality interpreters, (2) cultural sensitivity among professionals, (3) advocacy, (4) home-school communication, and (5) parent education. Implications for applying research to practice are discussed.

Key Words: home-school partnerships, culturally, linguistically diverse families, Chinese families, family, schools, disabilities, special education students, disability, special needs, parents, communication, Asian, advocacy

Introduction

Since 1975, several regulations protecting the rights of children and youth with disabilities aged 3 to 21 years old have been made and revised in the United States. These regulations include the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142), Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), IDEA

Amendments of 1997 (IDEA '97), and Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004). In order to ensure that these children and youth receive free and appropriate education, the regulations state clearly that parents must be members of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, meeting annually with professionals to discuss the services and placements of students with disabilities. Numerous parental rights are stated in the regulations. For example, parents can request IEP meetings any time during the year and discuss their children's educational program; parents can request that schools conduct evaluations when disabilities are suspected to be the cause of poor academic performance; schools must provide parents with progress reports regarding their children's performance toward the IEP goals and objectives; and parents can request to have evaluation reports sent to them before IEP meetings. One purpose of these rights is to inform schools that parents' voices are important and should be included in the development of their child's educational program.

It is undeniable that the U.S population has changed rapidly in the past few decades. Between 1980 and 2006, the rate of increase for the culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) population was very high, between 41% and 269% (see Table 1; U.S. Census Bureau, 2006; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2005). This drastic change in population directly and dramatically affects the demographics of the school-age population. Currently, CLD students comprise almost half (43%) of the school-age population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). Among the students receiving special education in 2005-2006, 41% of them were from the diverse population (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). While the number of CLD students with and without disabilities increased rapidly, less than 20% of educators (general and special education) were from the CLD population (Strizek, Pittsonberger, Riordan, Lyter, & Orlofsky, 2006; University of Florida, 2003). The diverse student population, combined with the shortage of teachers from diverse backgrounds, is forcing schools to evaluate their ways of collaborating with CLD families.

Table 1. Changes in U.S. Population, 1980 – 2006, by Race and Ethnicity

	1980	1990	2000	2006	Growth 1980 – 2006
White	181,140	188,725	195,769	197,841	9%
African American	26,215	29,439	34,413	37,052	41%
American Indian/ Alaska Native	1,336	1,793	2,104	2,370	77%
Hispanic	14,869	22,573	35,647	44,253	198%
Asian/Pacific Islander	3,665	7,092	10,827	13,528	269%

Note. Numbers are in thousands.

Existing literature suggests that developing an effective home-school partnership with CLD families of children with disabilities has been a challenge (e.g., Hughes, Valle-Riestra, & Arguelles, 2002; Lian & Fontànez-Phelan, 2001; Smalley & Reyes-Blanes, 2001; Zionts, Zionts, Harrison, & Bellinger, 2003). These studies suggested that cultural differences between families and schools could affect the level of home-school partnership. Some CLD families felt that educators did not respect their cultural background. Zionts et al. interviewed African American families of 24 children with moderate to severe disabilities regarding their perceptions of cultural sensitivity demonstrated by the school district. These families felt that many teachers, especially the Caucasian teachers, did not have a solid cultural understanding of them and their children. Some families also reported that cultural sensitivity did not exist in their children's school. In another study, Park, Turnbull, and Park (2001) conducted in-depth phone interviews with 10 Korean American parents of children with disabilities regarding their perceptions of their partnerships with professionals who served their children. One parent reported that the objectives professionals developed for her child were unrealistic. One objective was for the child to explore the texture of different foods with (his or her) fingers. However, in the Korean culture, touching food with hands was not encouraged.

The second common challenge that CLD families face is the language barrier (e.g., Harry, 1992; Hughes et al., 2002; Tellier-Robinson, 2000). The shortage of bilingual professionals restricts non- and limited-English speaking families from accessing information and programs which could be helpful to their child with disabilities. Park et al. (2001) reported that language barriers isolated 8 of the 10 limited-English speaking parents interviewed from meaningful partnerships with service providers, limited their access to basic information and advocacy, and prevented them from participating actively in school meetings and events. In another relevant study, Tellier-Robinson (2000) interviewed nine Portuguese-speaking families regarding their involvement in their child's education. These parents also reported that because of their limited English abilities, they were unable to attend many meetings and events organized by the schools. These parents did not feel that they were welcome to speak with school officials regarding their child. In addition, the CLD parents stated that other barriers, such as inflexible work schedules and a lack of transportation and child care services, prevented them from being active school participants (Peña, 2000).

Although many studies attempt to determine how schools can better involve families of children with disabilities (Hughes et al., 2002; Lian & Fontànez-Phelan, 2001; Peña, 2000; Torres-Burgo, Reyes-Wasson, & Brusca-Vega, 1999; Zetlin, Padron, & Wilson, 1996), a majority of these studies focus on African

American and Hispanic families of children with disabilities. Although Asian students with disabilities are under-represented in special education, the number of Asian students with disabilities continues to increase, making them the third largest group to receive special education services (U.S. Department of Education, 2005, 2007). Combined with the shortage of bilingual educators, there is a need for more research to examine whether or not the needs of the Asian families of children with disabilities are being met and how schools can collaborate with these families effectively. The purpose of this study was to examine the expectations of Chinese families of children with disabilities towards American schools. The findings of this study can add to the store of information schools need to develop effective home-school partnerships with this population.

Method

Participants

Twelve Chinese parents of children with disabilities were the participants of the study. All parents were immigrants from China. Their length of stay in the U.S. ranged from 3 years to 15 years. One parent spoke Mandarin, while the others spoke Cantonese (see Table 2 for the demographics of the participants). One participant had two children with disabilities, another participant had three children with disabilities, and the remaining families each had one child with a disability. The disabilities of the participants' children ranged from mild to severe (see Table 3).

Parents participating in this study were identified through collaboration with two parent support groups in Eastern Massachusetts. At the time of the study, these two groups were the only ones in the area that served Chinese families of children with disabilities. One group served five families, and the second group served seven families. The researcher was invited by the coordinators of both support groups to attend their monthly group meetings to meet the families, inform them of the purpose of the study, and recruit participants. All 12 parents from both groups were eager to share their expectations of schools with the researcher and expressed interest in participating in the study. The researcher of this study has unique qualifications which enable her to communicate freely with the participants without cultural and linguistic barriers. She is fluent in both Cantonese and Mandarin, and has extensive experience in special education.

Table 2. Demographic Information of the Participants

Parents	Highest Degree Earned	Occupation	Economic Status ^a	English Proficiency ^b
1	Associate degree	Housewife	High	Fluent
2	Bachelor's degree in home country	Housewife	Low	Limited
3	Bachelor's degree	Self-employed	High	Fluent
4	5th-grade in home country	Housewife	Low	Non
5	Master's degree	Computer engineer	High	Fluent
6	High school graduate in home country	Accountant clerk	High	Fluent
7	Sixth grade in home country	Housewife	Low	Limited
8	High school graduate in home country	Housewife	Low	Non
9	High school graduate in home country	Housewife	Low	Limited
10	High school graduate in home country	Housewife	Low	Limited
11	High school graduate in home country	Salesperson	Low	Fluent
12	High school graduate in home country	Factory worker	Low	Limited

^aThe economic status was determined by the income level reported by the participants.

^bThe level of English language proficiency was reported by the participants.

Table 3. Demographic Information of Participants' Children

	# of Participants' Children
Grade level	
Elementary	10
Secondary	5
Gender	
Male	10
Female	5
Types of disabilities	
Hearing impairment	1
Specific learning disability	1
Autism	9
Intellectual impairment	4
Placement	
General education classrooms with in-class support	3
Substantial separate classrooms	12

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were used in the study. Interviews are commonly used in studies that investigate the perceptions of families of children with disabilities toward schools (Park et al., 2001; Pruitt, Wandry, & Hollums, 1998). There were two advantages of collecting data using an interview format. First, using personal interviews to collect information on participants' experiences provided more in-depth, personal, and elaborated information (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Second, the interview process allowed the researcher and participants to interact (Mitchell & Jolley, 2001). The Chinese population is considered a people of a high-context culture (Chan & Lee, 2004), which means that their communication style relies more on nonverbal than verbal language. One-on-one interviews were helpful in eliciting detailed information. Finally, given their view of family privacy, Chinese parents were assumed to consider family matters involving their children with disabilities as private matters which should not be openly discussed with others (Hyun & Fowler, 1995). Interviewing each participant individually was therefore more appropriate than using other formats of data collection.

Before the interviews took place, the researcher attended four monthly meetings in each of the two support groups. This opportunity allowed the researcher to develop rapport with the participating families. Each family was asked to select a convenient location for the interview to take place; all chose their home. Each interview lasted between 1 and 2 hours. Brief follow-up phone interviews were also conducted for clarifications.

The interview guide, consisting of 15 open-ended questions, was derived from the work of previous researchers (e.g., Park et al., 2001; Pruitt et al., 1998; see Table 4 for sample questions). Some questions were added based on the participants' responses. During the interview, the researcher probed parents to be specific and provide in-depth information. All interviews were conducted in Chinese, the participants' preferred language. Permission was also obtained for the interviews to be audiotaped. (Note: All names used are pseudonyms.)

Table 4. Sample Interview Questions

1. Please tell me a brief history of your child's disability.
2. What is your role in your child's education?
3. Please describe your relationship with your child's school.
4. Have you experienced any challenges when interacting with school professionals? What are those challenges?
5. What are your expectations of the school and professionals (teachers and other service providers)?

Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed verbatim into Chinese by the researcher, who is fluent in both Cantonese and Mandarin. All participants were invited to review the transcripts for accuracy. Two participants required the researcher to include additional information in their transcript, while the other parents reported that no change was needed. Next, the researcher translated all transcripts into English. A graduate student who was fluent in both Chinese and English was asked to review the translations for accuracy; the overall rate of agreement was 95%.

A coding system was developed to analyze the interview data. The researcher examined all interview transcripts and searched for common themes. Using the constant comparative method as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967), categories were developed. If any of the data did not belong to any of these categories, new categories were established. After all the data were coded, two graduate students were asked to review the transcripts independently and determine the accuracy of coding. A 90% interrater reliability was found. The researcher and the graduate students discussed the differences until consensus was reached.

Results

The participants of this study reported that they were very thankful that their children could attend schools in the U.S. and receive special education services. However, these parents faced many challenges when trying to advocate for their children and collaborate with professionals such as educators and service providers. Based upon the 12 Chinese parents' responses, they had five expectations from the American schools: accessibility of quality interpreters, cultural sensitivity among professionals, advocacy, home-school communication, and parent education.

Accessibility of Quality Interpreters

The Chinese parents included in the study were very concerned about their children's performance in school and wanted to be informed regarding their children's progress. Although interpreters were provided by many schools in IEP meetings, they were unavailable during other school hours. The seven participants who were non- or limited-English speakers reported that they did not have the language proficiency to maintain close contact with the professionals. Something as simple as informing their child's teachers that their child was sick and had to miss school was a challenge for these parents. One mother of a 12-year-old son with intellectual impairment said,

I don't know English. Someone told me that I could write to the teacher in Chinese and someone at the school could translate the message to her, but the teacher never responded. I don't know other ways to communicate with the teacher.

Additionally, these seven parents were often reluctant to attend school events because they were unable to communicate with the teachers. A mother of two children with autism said,

I always want to go to Open House. That's the best opportunity for me to speak with the teacher, but there was nobody who could help me. I wish there were a person who could interpret for me...follow me around. I tried several times to go and speak with the teacher by myself, but it didn't work. It was very difficult because of my English.

Being unable to read the school documents was another challenge the Chinese parents faced. Documents such as IEP reports were often not translated in a timely manner. According to the parents, English IEPs were usually mailed to them one or two weeks after meetings, but the translated IEPs would not be available until two to five months after the meetings. According to the state regulations, upon receiving the IEP, parents are required to return a signed copy to the school within 30 days (MA Department of Education, 2007). In order to follow the regulations, parents would have to sign the IEPs without knowing the contents of the document. One parent who had an 8-year-old daughter with cerebral palsy said,

I didn't know that her PT [physical therapy] services were terminated. One time, I spoke with a Chinese paraprofessional at my daughter's school. I asked her how come I never received a progress report from the PT. She told me that my daughter has stopped receiving PT since last month. I was shocked....A few months later, I received the translated IEP and her PT services were really removed.

This parent felt that if she had received the translated IEP earlier, she would have known about the changes in her daughter's services. When I asked the parent whether or not this matter was discussed at the IEP meetings, she reported that she was not aware of it. If the changes in her daughter's services had been discussed at the meetings, then the interpreter did not interpret the message to her. Four other parents, one non-English speaker and three limited-English speakers, also felt that if interpreters had been available in school during other hours, the parents could have obtained help from the interpreters and found out about the contents of the IEPs before signing them.

The five participants who considered themselves fluent English speakers also reported difficulties understanding some of the terminology used by

professionals in meetings and on evaluation reports. These parents stated that evaluation reports were often written with technical terms (e.g., standard scores and percentile ranks) and acronyms (e.g., WJ-III and ABAS-II) that confused them. They wanted professionals to know that although the parents were fluent English speakers, they were not trained in special education. Professionals should not assume that parents can understand the technical terms commonly used among them. In order to ensure that all team members had the same information and could discuss it in meetings, the parents suggested that the professionals avoid using specialized terminology. If certain terms must be used, the parents reasoned, then the professionals should make sure that parents understand them. These parents also felt that having interpreters in schools would help resolve this challenge.

According to the participants, having full-time interpreters could be beneficial to both schools and parents. Interpreters could provide parents with assistance whenever they need assistance, such as speaking with professionals during the hours outside of IEP meetings. The interpreters could also help proofread any documents that were sent home to ensure that they did not contain any technical terms. Because these interpreters usually had the same cultural backgrounds as parents, they could also bridge the cultural gaps between schools and Chinese families.

Cultural Sensitivity Among Professionals

The second expectation the Chinese families had on schools was the need to train professionals to be culturally sensitive. They felt that it was very disrespectful when schools sent home documents that were not written in their language. They did not feel that schools wanted to be their equal partners. Moreover, four of the participants reported that on several occasions, some professionals were particularly insensitive to the parent's culture. One of the parents of a 17-year-old daughter with autism said,

The speech teacher said that Katherine didn't have eye contact, so she didn't teach her pronunciation. I was really upset about this....Every parent at the school doesn't like this teacher. There are two other parents of kids with special needs also think that she is crazy. I scolded her at the meeting. I asked her whether or not she has ever taken the civilization course....In America, every single college considers that to be a required course now. I told her that there are many cultures in this world that students don't look at the teacher in the eye because it's impolite, and you can get whacked. Then I asked her, "How does a blind child learn how to speak? They shouldn't have eye contact. Right?" She said that she had this and that experience. Then I asked her, "How many Chinese autistic

children have you taught?”...I did not fight for more time slots with her. I [would] rather have my child spend more time with other teachers who can teach. Why bother to waste time, since she said my daughter doesn’t have eye contact, and she doesn’t want to teach her. If she doesn’t teach her pronunciation, then that’s not speech. If she doesn’t teach her pronunciation, then she is wasting my daughter’s time.

Another parent of a 9-year-old son with autism also felt that her son’s teacher did not like her to be included in school activities due to her ethnicity. She said,

Sometimes the teacher sent home notes about class field trips. I used to check the box saying that I could go with the class. However, the teacher never wanted me to go....I don’t know why. She never told me why. It happened so many times...so now I check the box saying that I cannot go....I don’t want to think that it’s because I am Chinese. But when she did that all the time, it’s hard not to wonder if it’s really because of my race. I can speak English. I can communicate with the teacher, the students, and all the other parents, so why didn’t she want me to go? I don’t know.

Four of the Chinese parents also reported that sometimes the professionals would offer some suggestions that were culturally insensitive. For example, one mother said that a professional suggested she should cut up the child’s food in pieces so that the child can feed herself with a fork. However, the family often had porridge and noodle soup for dinner. It was very difficult for her to be compliant with the teacher’s suggestion. This parent felt that if the professionals tried to get to know the family, such unrealistic suggestions could be avoided.

Advocacy

Due to many reasons, such as budgeting issues and shortage of staff, all the participants believed that school professionals might not advocate for their children. The parents felt that if they relied on schools to advocate for their children, their children might not get the services they needed. A mother of an 11-year-old son with Hunter’s Syndrome said,

They [professionals] know that my son needs an aide to help him because he swallows anything he sees. It’s dangerous....He had swallowed crayons and erasers before. One time, his teacher pulled me aside and told me that she also felt that my son should have an aide with him. Ah! Why didn’t she say that at the meeting?

Nine of the parents reported that they had invited paid or free advocates to accompany them to IEP meetings. The parents considered an advocate as someone more knowledgeable than themselves regarding special education law and the types of services their child needed. One mother of a child with pervasive developmental disorder (PDD) said,

When my son turned 3 years old, he went to public school. He didn't have any services. No speech. No OT. Even in class, he only received 15 minutes of indirect services. I finally hired an advocate. After that, they gave me 1 hour speech and 1 hour OT. The second year, I saw that he still didn't have any speech. The advocate helped me fight for 1½ hours of speech. This is what I had to do.

All the parents felt that because professionals were more knowledgeable than they were regarding their children's disabilities and what services they needed, the parents wanted the professionals to speak up and advocate for their child. Children should always come first. If a professional knew that certain services or support should be provided to the child or that certain curriculum should be used instead of another, then that professional should advocate for the child and inform the other professionals in the team. The parents felt that it was very ineffective and exhausting if they were the only ones who kept asking for the support and services their child needed.

Home-School Communication

Maintaining communication is one of the keys to successful home-school partnerships. Because many of the participants' children were unable to inform their parents about their school days, parents indicated that they would like teachers to let them know what their child did and what his/her behavior was like in school. Although some teachers used daily notebooks to inform parents about their child's progress, seven of the parents reported that many of the teachers' messages were very brief, such as "Tom did well today" or "Katie appeared to be very tired today." These messages did not really inform parents about what their child did in school. Additionally, because homework was often not assigned to these children, parents were unable to know what their children had learned in school.

Furthermore, two parents stated that they often had difficulties staying in touch with their child's teacher. One father of a son with PDD said that he tried many times to set up an appointment with the teacher, but the teacher never responded. He said,

I called her at school...left messages. I e-mailed her. When I dropped my son off in the morning, I asked her to set up a time. She said she would

get back to me, but she never did. I want to observe my son in the classroom. I want to learn how the teacher teaches him...what methods they use, so I can use them at home.

This parent did consider contacting the school principal regarding this matter. However, he was worried that if he did, it could destroy his relationship with the teacher and would eventually do harm to his son, so he decided not to pursue this matter. This father felt that his son's teacher might have misinterpreted that his reason for observing the class was to check up on her.

The participants suggested that teachers send home informal daily progress notes that included such information as their child's school performance and if there were any skills that they could reinforce at home. The parents suggested that for the parents who did not speak English fluently, the notes should be written in their primary language. Furthermore, they felt that professionals should send home their child's daily schedule and that parents should be welcome to visit their child's class anytime during school hours.

Parent Education

All the parents stated that they had limited knowledge about their child's disability and how to best provide support for their children. Because all the parents had been educated outside of the U.S., they were not familiar with the school system and teaching methods that were used in this country. However, they felt it was their duty to supplement their child's education at home. Three parents, all highly educated in the U.S., stated that they had tried to search for information about how to teach their children. However, the information on the internet was limited. These parents needed hands-on demonstrations. They wanted the professionals to take the time to educate them in these areas. Several parents said that because they did not know the appropriate methods to teach their children, they often used the same methods used when they were students in China. They knew that those teaching methods were old and might not be the most effective ones, but they did not know how best to become informed of the current teaching practices. One mother said regarding her daughter, "I felt that because I didn't know how to help her, I was actually doing more harm than good to her." If parents could be informed regarding the strategies the professionals used at school, they believed their child could make better progress.

Discussion

The relationship between families and school is crucial in supporting our children (Epstein & Sanders, 2000; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). The findings of this study indicated that all participating Chinese families tried their best

in supporting their children with disabilities. All the parents were thankful that their children with disabilities could continue receiving education. These parents understood that collaborating with professionals was vital. However, many barriers, such as cultural and language differences, prevented them from participating fully. The 12 Chinese parents in this study reported that they had several expectations from the schools and hoped that the schools would be willing to collaborate with them and make the best decisions for their children.

Regardless of their level of English proficiency, the Chinese parents in this study encountered difficulty communicating with professionals in and outside of IEP meetings. The parents who were not fluent in English were unable to understand all the school documents that were written in English. Due to the unavailability of interpreters, communicating with professionals continued to be a challenge for these parents. On the other hand, parents who were fluent in English also reported that the terminology that was commonly used by professionals often confused them. These parents felt that the key to successful home-school partnerships was communication. Having interpreters available in schools could help bring the home closer to the schools. Similar to the Chinese parents of the study, the Latino parents in Hughes et al.'s (2001) study also experienced difficulties communicating with professionals. They strongly urged schools to hire interpreters, so they would be available at all times during school hours to support the parents who were not fluent English speakers. Interpreters could not only help bridge the communication gap between parents and professionals but also help translate materials, such as IEPs and informal progress notes, so all parents could be informed.

Another key factor to successful home-school partnerships is having culturally sensitive staff members in the school (Voltz, 1994). The Chinese parents in this study reported that some professionals in their child's school did not respect their culture and would sometimes offer unrealistic suggestions to them regarding how to work with their children. Flett and Conderman (2001) suggested that professionals take the time to learn about parents' cultural beliefs and values. The professionals' knowledge and appreciation of the parents' culture would allow them to have effective communication and develop a trusting relationship with parents (Jordan, Reyes-Blanes, Peel, Peel, & Lane, 1998). However, professionals must be aware that although there may be a set of common values within each cultural subgroup, it is important to view each family as a unique unit influenced by its culture, but not defined by it (Lynch & Hanson, 2004). Furthermore, professionals should be honest about what is best for their students. When the children with disabilities require certain services in order to be successful, the educators and service providers should advocate for them. Parents should not be the only ones who advocate for their children,

because some of these parents might not have the knowledge and language abilities to fulfill their advocacy roles.

Immigrants who are new to the U.S. may not be familiar with the system of special education system in America. In China, there are only three categories of disabilities: visual impairment, hearing impairment, and mental retardation (Yang, Ding, & Chang, 2007). However, in the U.S., there are 13 different disability categories. The description of each disability may also be different among the countries. In other words, assuming that parents are familiar with their child's disability is detrimental. The Chinese parents of this study were very involved in their children's academic careers. However, due to a lack of knowledge regarding their child's disability, parents often did not know what services would be appropriate for their children and had to rely heavily on the professionals' opinions. Furthermore, because these parents were not educated in the U.S. and were not familiar with the current teaching methods for their children, they felt that their inability to teach their children was an obstacle to their children's success. These parents were desperate to advocate for their children and receive information about how to best support their children at home. Organizing parent education nights could address this challenge and ensure that the same teaching methods were used in both school and home.

In order to build effective relationships, schools and CLD parents must make an effort to bridge cultural and linguistic gaps. By understanding the Chinese parents' expectations of schools, immediate action should be taken to eliminate these gaps. Otherwise, professionals and Chinese parents will continue to face challenges collaborating with each other, and the end result will impact the children negatively.

Although this study provides information regarding the expectations of Chinese parents of children with disabilities of schools, several limitations do apply. First, only the expectations of 12 Chinese families of children with disabilities were examined. Results of this study should not be generalized to all Chinese families of children with disabilities. Second, some information might have been lost during translation. Although the researcher and translator were fluent in Chinese and English, many terms and phrases in Chinese could not be directly translated into English. Therefore, English words which could capture the general meaning were used. Finally, only the parents' perspectives were investigated in this study. Inclusion of the perspectives of professionals might have provided more insight into the development of effective home-school partnerships. Despite these limitations, this study did provide further insight into the existing literature regarding the expectations of the Chinese families of children with disabilities towards school and how schools could develop collaborative partnerships with this population.

Implications for Research to Practice

Based on the interviews, the following recommendations are offered as ways to develop more effective partnerships between CLD families and schools.


1. In order to ensure that there is no communication gap between schools and homes, having full-time interpreters at schools would be crucial. However, as school budgets continue to shrink every year, instead of having full-time interpreters, schools may want to consider having part-time interpreters of different languages available on certain days of the week. For example, having a Spanish interpreter on Monday and Tuesday, Chinese interpreter on Wednesday and Thursday, and Portuguese interpreter on Tuesday and Friday. Both educators and parents can seek language supports on the days the interpreters are available.
2. Many of the interpreters schools hire may not have knowledge in the field (and vocabulary) of special education. It would be important for schools to provide them with training so that their translation and interpretation services to CLD families can be more effective. If such training is not possible, educators and service providers are strongly advised to meet with the interpreters prior to meetings to insure that they will be able to provide quality translations.
3. As the number of CLD children with disabilities continues to increase in the U.S., school districts should consider hiring more professionals and paraprofessionals from diverse cultures. Universities could also collaborate with school districts so that they can recruit and train more linguistically diverse credential candidates for the special education field. These professionals could not only help communicate with CLD parents during school hours, but also bridge the cultural gap between schools and home.
4. Informing parents regarding their child's progress is crucial. However, such a daily progress note is often written in English and does not include sufficient information. In order to address teachers' busy schedule, creating a daily progress note template (see Figure 1) and having it translated at the beginning of the year would be helpful. Teachers and/or paraprofessionals can simply fill in the information which informs parents regarding what their child has worked on at school.
5. In addition to reporting to parents regarding their child's progress, educators should consider using a portion of the parent-teacher conference time to share some teaching strategies with parents, so that they can use the same methods to reinforce their child's skills at home. It is more effective to have the educators and parents use the same materials and methods to teach each child.

- 6. Cultural awareness workshops should be offered to professionals on a continual basis. Instead of only identifying the common characteristics of each cultural subgroup, the workshops should focus on the challenges professionals face when working with CLD families and how to address them. Professionals should be aware that what seems common behavior in the dominant culture can be offensive in another culture.
- 7. Schools should also consider collaborating with local community agencies that offer workshops or trainings that can educate CLD families of children with disabilities regarding the special education system and current teaching practices.


Figure 1. Sample daily progress report template.

Date: _____


Today, Jane went to



(Speech therapy) and worked on _____.




(Physical therapy) and worked on _____.




(Occupational therapy) and worked on _____.


In the classroom, we worked on the following:




_____.




_____.



_____.



_____.



_____.

Additional Comments:

Completed by: _____ (Classroom Teacher/Teacher Assistant)

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Lusa Lo is an assistant professor of curriculum and instruction at the University of Massachusetts Boston. Her research interests include assessment of culturally and linguistically diverse students, family-school-community partnerships, and the overrepresentation of students of color in special education. Correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to Dr. Lusa Lo, University of Massachusetts Boston, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, 100 Morrissey Blvd., Boston, MA, 02125.